



**TESTIMONY OF ATTORNEY JEFF GENTES
IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING FOR THE
CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING CENTER**

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Jeff Gentes, and I am the managing attorney for foreclosure prevention at the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. We are a private non-profit serving the entire state, and have requested that the funding contained in the Governor's budget for our foreclosure prevention work through DECD, \$168,639 of Banking Fund money, remain. This money is crucial to support our foreclosure prevention work.

We are on the front lines of a severe foreclosure crisis that has spread throughout the state. Over the two years we have talked to homeowners in at least 156 out of Connecticut's 169 towns. Court filings have dipped recently, but only because banks needed time to clean up the mess revealed by the robo-perjury scandal – overall delinquency numbers remain high: one in 14 Connecticut homeowners with a mortgage is either more than 90 days behind on their mortgage or in foreclosure. The Center for Responsible Lending and the National Consumer Law Center report that we will hit the midpoint of the foreclosure crisis later this year, five years after it began.

Foreclosures hurt more than Connecticut's homeowners. They cost towns and taxpayers. On average, municipalities spend \$19,000 in police, fire, and maintenance costs per foreclosure. Neighbors' property values usually drop thousands of dollars as a result of a foreclosure, and social services are strained whenever a family loses their home.

Many foreclosures can be prevented, but doing so means navigating the judicial process, negotiating with difficult mortgage servicers, keeping up with an ever-changing legal landscape,

listening to those on the ground, and being on the ground. That is what we do, and we are the only organization in Connecticut that provides free legal assistance and resources to homeowners facing foreclosure.

The Governor's budget includes a line item of \$168,639 to support the Center's foreclosure prevention work. Given how much foreclosures cost towns, the request would pay for itself if we prevented 9 foreclosures. With help from your funding, in the past two years we have taught more than 2200 homeowners how to represent themselves in a foreclosure proceeding in our legal clinics in Hartford and Fairfield County and at housing counselor orientations in New Haven, Waterbury, Norwich, and New London, distributed more than 10,000 copies of our manual for homeowners facing foreclosure in both English and Spanish, and provided individualized advice, including formal representation in eleven judicial districts, to more than 1000 homeowners. We trained and supported more than 200 *pro bono* attorneys and paralegals, the state's CHFA-approved housing counselors, the Department of Banking's Foreclosure Assistance Hotline, and we trained the Judicial Branch's foreclosure mediators. We served on the Bench-Bar Foreclosure Committee and CHFA's Loss Mitigation Committee and have worked with local groups like New Haven's ROOF Project on their foreclosure prevention efforts. Our work has been recognized nationally, and we have conducted trainings for attorneys across the country and for foreclosure mediators in both Maine and Maryland. We believe your funding helped prevent far more than 9 foreclosures in Connecticut, and believe continued funding will help prevent hundreds, if not thousands more, in the next year.

Our work makes the difference for homeowners like Tim from Watertown. Tim broke his back at work and sought assistance from his lender in obtaining a loan modification so that he could keep his home – a home specially outfitted for his disabled son. After fighting on his own

for more than two years, going through an incredible runaround, our assistance helped Tim swiftly obtain the relief he needed. An improving economy and job growth would help thousands of homeowners across the state who are facing foreclosure – but we believe thousands more, like Tim, would still need skilled attorney help to keep their home.

Thank you for your time and for your past support of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, and please continue to support our foreclosure prevention efforts. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (860) 263-0741 with any questions you may have.

